SUSTAINING THE FUTURE
PRESS RELEASE

EARTH SUMMIT

NEW COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TO MEET ON FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF EARTH SUMMIT

Governments to Consider Funding for Rio Agreements and Multi-year Review of Agenda 21

NEW YORK, 24 May -- After almost a year of difficult negotiations among Governments, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development will hold its first session on the anniversary of the Earth Summit, whose work it will continue.

United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will meet at UN Headquarters, New York, from 14 to 25 June 1993. The opening session will be preceded by a special event to mark the first anniversary of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, last June.

A high-level segment to be attended mostly by environment and finance ministers is scheduled for 23-24 June to add political weight in resolving contentious issues and provide policy guidance for future deliberations.

The Earth Summit, which was the largest-ever gathering of world leaders, was called to address the relationship between unsustainable economic patterns and global environmental degradation. It adopted Agenda 21, a comprehensive blueprint for action to promote sustainable development worldwide into the 21st century.

The 53-member Commission has been set up to monitor how the recommendations in Agenda 21 and other Rio agreements are being implemented by Governments and by the United Nations and its agencies, including problems of funding and transfer of environmentally sound technology.

Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, who has been elected Chair of the Commission, commented that it is "arguably the main tangible accomplishment of the Rio Summit." He added, "There is a huge reservoir of goodwill and hope, not only from Governments but also from people and organizations, that the Commission should and must succeed in its work. On the heels of these expectations come also close scrutiny and pressure." Ambassador Razali has been a driving force behind negotiations during and since the Summit.

PROGRESS ON FINANCING AGENDA 21

One of the Commission's main functions will be to monitor the adequacy of levels of funding and mechanisms for financing sustainable development in developing countries.

UNITED NATIONS

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At the Earth Summit, it was estimated that implementing Agenda 21 in developing countries would cost an estimated US$ 600 billion between now and the year 2000. Of this, some US$ 125 billion will be required in new and additional financing from multilateral agencies (such as the UN) and bilaterally, between Governments. Areas needing high levels of financing include sewage and waste management, environmentally sound energy technologies and poverty alleviation, all of which have major impacts on the ecosystems that sustain life.

Despite the high price tag, Governments acknowledged in Rio that the cost of not acting to ensure the future of the planet could outweigh the financial costs of translating Agenda 21 into reality. However, new resources have been slow in materializing.

IDA. Several proposals for funding were adopted in Rio, among them that Governments provide additional finance to the International Development Association (IDA) and that part of the World Bank's income be allocated to an "Earth Increment" to support countries' environmental projects. IDA is an affiliate of the World Bank which makes no-interest loans to the poorest countries.

In December 1992, 34 donor countries agreed to make available US$ 18 billion for IDA programmes for the period 1 July 1993 to 1 July 1996. This is about the same level, in real terms, as was provided for 1990-1993. No funding was approved for an Earth Increment.

GEF. In Rio, many donor Governments supported the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as the preferred mechanism for channeling additional funds. Administered jointly by the World Bank, the UN Environment Programme and the UN Development Programme, GEF now finances projects dealing with protection of the ozone layer and biodiversity, climate change and pollution of international waters. It is currently being restructured to give developing countries more decision-making power, as recommended in Rio, and possibly to expand the range of the projects it supports.

Some US$ 1.3 billion was committed for GEF projects during its three-year Pilot Phase ending 1993. At a replenishment meeting to take place on 25 May 1993 in Beijing, Governments will discuss proposals calling for new funding of US$ 2.8 billion to US$ 4 billion over three to five years.

Capacity 21. A new initiative by the UN Development Programme, Capacity 21, has generated US$ 30 million in contributions from six donor Governments since the Earth Summit. Funds will be used to help developing countries elaborate "green plans" and strengthen their capacity to implement Agenda 21.

MULTI-YEAR REVIEW OF AGENDA 21

To keep the follow-up to the Earth Summit on track, the Commission is expected to adopt a multi-year programme of work at its June session by which cross-sectoral issues such as financial resources, funding mechanisms, capacity-building, transfer of environmentally sound technology, science, education, and structures for decision-making will be considered annually.

Clusters of sectoral issues such as fresh water, human settlements and health; land, desertification, forests and biodiversity; atmosphere, oceans and seas; and toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes would be taken up once during a three-year period, possibly in relation to UN Conferences and other events. All issues would be considered by 1997, when the General Assembly has called for a major review of Agenda 21.

The Commission will also decide on guidelines for how Governments might provide information on activities implementing Agenda 21. This is a politically sensitive issue. Some developing countries have expressed concern that the Commission might judge countries on their environmental records without regard to financial and other constraints, and that development assistance might be tied to a country's environmental policies.

Sources involved in pre-session negotiations say they are hopeful that some Governments will agree to submit reports on a voluntary basis until confidence in the Commission builds. Country reports could be used during sectoral discussions to target problem areas for action and share positive solutions.

COMMISSION BACKGROUND AND MEMBERSHIP

At the Earth Summit, Governments recommended that a Commission on Sustainable Development be created to ensure effective follow-up. In December 1992, the UN General Assembly agreed and decided to establish the Commission as a subsidiary of the UN Economic and Social Council.

The following 53 Commission members were elected by ECOSOC in February 1993. Terms will be for three years, but initially countries will serve for one, two or three years in order to stagger membership.
To serve through 1993: Angola, Barbados, Belarus, Bulgaria, Canada, Guinea, India, Italy, Japan, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela.
To serve through 1994: Algeria, Australia, Austria, Benin, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Hungary, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu.
To serve through 1995: Antigua and Barbuda, Belgium, Boliva, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Gabon, Germany, Iceland, Indonesia, Malawi, Namibia, Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay.

The Commission will meet formally for two to three weeks each year; in addition, inter-sessional meetings and negotiations will be held as needed. A High-Level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development, to be composed of eminent persons from government, business, academic, scientific and NGO communities, will be appointed by the UN Secretary-General to assist the Commission in its work.

The secretariat for the Commission will be headed by Mr. Nitin Desai (India), former Deputy Secretary-General of UNCED, who has been appointed head of the new UN Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.

NGO PARTICIPATION

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have continued to provide a strong impetus in post-Summit negotiations, and a significant NGO presence is expected at the Commission session in June, a Rio reunion on a smaller scale. NGOs accredited to the fourth meeting of the UNCED Preparatory Committee (New York, March 1992) are eligible to apply for status on the CSD roster. Contact: NGO Unit, Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, Room DC2-2340, United Nations, New York NY 10017; tel. (212) 963-4842, fax (212) 963-4324.

OTHER RIO AGREEMENTS AND INITIATIVES

Rio Declaration and Forest Principles. At the Earth Summit, Governments also adopted a Rio Declaration on Environment and Development -- 27 principles defining the rights and responsibilities of Governments in this area -- and a set of principles to guide sustainable management of forests worldwide. Review of these agreements will be integrated into the Commission's discussions of Agenda 21.

Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions. Two legally-binding Conventions -- aimed at preventing global climate change and the extinction of biologically diverse species -- were opened for signing at the Summit. To date 163 Governments have signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and 161 have signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Conventions will take effect when they are ratified by national legislatures in a specific number of countries. The biodiversity agreement requires 30 ratifications and has to date received 17. The climate change convention requires 50 ratifications and has received 19. (List of signatures and ratifications available on request.)

Other Initiatives. Other specific initiatives called for in Agenda 21 include an international legal agreement to combat desertification, especially in Africa; a global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States, to be held in April 1994 in Barbados; and a Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, to be held in August 1993.

Desertification. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Convention on Desertification will hold its first session in Nairobi, from 24 May to 3 June 1993. It will meet again in Geneva in September. The text of the Convention is expected to be completed by June 1994.

Migratory Fish. Preparations for the August Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks are well under way. At issue is the sustainable management of highly migratory species of fish and those which straddle countries' 200-mile exclusive economic zones.

Small Island States. The Preparatory Committee for the Conference on Small Island States will meet in New York, 2-13 August 1993. Technical meetings will be held in Vanuatu, 31 May-4 June, for countries of Asia, the Pacific and Indian Oceans; and in Trinidad and Tobago, 28 June-2 July for the Caribbean and Atlantic States.

Population Conference. Many of the issues raised at the Earth Summit will again take centre stage at the UN Conference on Population and Development, to be held in Cairo, 5-13 September 1994. The Conference is being organized by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to build global consensus on population issues as they relate to sustainable development and to seek ways to implement the 1974 UN World Population Plan of Action. The second preparatory meeting for the Conference was held in May in New York, and a third is planned for April 1994, also in New York.

UN SYSTEM FOLLOW-UP TO UNCED

At the highest level of the UN Secretariat, the newly established Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) has launched an extensive review of UN system activities, aimed at increasing agency cooperation internationally and in the field, and developing an effective and coherent response to Agenda 21. Throughout the UN system, work programmes are being reviewed, priorities re-ordered, existing activities reoriented and, where feasible, resources shifted to assist countries in meeting the key objectives of Agenda 21 as quickly as possible.

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Available on request:
Complete text of Agenda 21 or 40-page Press Summary
Texts of Rio Declaration, Forest Principles,
Conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity

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